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# STANDARDS

*William*  
W. C. *Crory* BY  
BROWNELL

NEW YORK  
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS  
1917

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# STANDARDS

## I

### MEASURES OF VALUE

**I**T is perhaps a little difficult precisely to define the term "standards," but it is happily even more superfluous than difficult because every one knows what it means. Whereas criticism deals with the rational application of principles applicable to the matter in hand, and has therefore a sufficiently delimited field of its own, standards are in different case. They belong in the realm of sense rather than in that of reason and are felt as ideal exemplars for measurement by comparison, not deduced as criteria of absolute authority. As such they



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arise insensibly in the mind which automatically sifts its experiences, and are not the direct result of reflection. In a word, they are the products not of philosophy but of culture, and consequently pertinent constituents of every one's intellectual baggage. And in the field of art and letters they play an especially prominent rôle because art and letters are artificial simplifications of material much less synthetized and therefore less susceptible of comparative measurement, namely nature and human life. The possession of them is equally essential to artist and public. Without standards in common it is impossible for artist and public to get together, for without them the two have no common language. Even low standards shared by each have undoubtedly a strong cementing force. Any kind of language uttered and savored consti-



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tutes a bond of solidarity — even the variety that Walpole said he used on principle because everybody understood it. A certain standard is therefore logically to be induced from even such practice as his — the elementary standard of comprehensibility. But as the instance of Walpole shows it may easily be a low one and, in considering art and letters at all events, I shall not be expected to apologize for using the word standard to denote a quality rather than a defect, and just as when we speak of “style” we mean good style and not bad, to mean by standards high standards not low, or what is the same thing, exacting not indulgent ones. Besides, speaking practically, nobody not negligible is extravagant enough even at the present time to profess low ones as such; and those that may be considered inevitable — since the act of



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judging in itself implies standards of some kind — are no doubt subconscious possessions. So that we may leave both these out of the account without risk of misconception in noting as one of the really significant signs of our revolutionary and transitional time the wide disappearance of standards altogether, the contempt felt for them as conventions, the indignation aroused by them as fetters, the hatred inspired by them as tyranny.

This spirit of revolt — conceived of course as renovation by its votaries but still manifestly in the destructive stage witnessed by the fierceness of its iconoclastic zest, so much greater than its constructive concentration — is plainly confined to no one people and to no one field of activity. It is indeed so marked in the field of art and letters because it is general and because the field of art and letters



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is less and less a sheltered enclosure and more and more open to the winds of the world. Everybody is agreed about the character of this spirit, both those to whom it signifies the New Day of a diviner order and those who deem it a return to chaos, fatuously exultant in the efficacy of a fresh start. Any consideration of it accordingly need lose no time in groping in the vague as to its nature. Its friends and foes, exponents and censors, would probably agree that one of its main constituent traits is impatience with established standards of all sorts; but what has not perhaps been as clearly perceived is the extension of this impatience to an inveterate hostility to standards in themselves — at least, as I have just noted, to all explicit and conscious ones. Goethe's idea of "culture conquests" has lost its value, because the new



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spirit involves a break with, not an evolution of, the past. In the new *belles lettres* a historical reference arouses uneasiness and a mythological allusion irritation because they are felt to be not obscure but outworn. The heart sinks with ennui at the mention of Amáryllis in the shade and thrills with pleasure in imaging the imagist in the bath. The plight of the pedant in the face of such preferences as prevail arouses pity. His entire mental furniture is of a sudden outmoded. The coin may be of standard weight and fineness, it loses its currency if its design is not novel—making it, that is to say, *fiat* and irredeemable in the mart of art, sterling only in its grosser capacity. The objection is to formulations themselves as restrictions on energy.

The age feels its vitality with a more exquisite consciousness than any that



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has preceded it. It does little else, one may say in a large view, than in one form or another express, illustrate, or celebrate this consciousness. And every one who sympathetically "belongs" to it feels himself staunchly supported by the consensus of all it esteems. Nothing fortifies — and occludes, it may be added — like such confirmation. The militancy of the age therefore finds itself not only in possession of a perfectly definite — if mainly destructive — credo, but of a practically united and enthusiastic army. Bunyan would certainly have given the banner inscribed "Anarchy" to one of his Diabolonian captains. But who now reads Bunyan — any more than Bolingbroke — or has ever read him? All the "modernist" needs to do if challenged is to follow the example of Max Müller, who replied to an opponent seeking to confute



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him by citing St. Paul: "Oh! Paulus; I do not agree with Paulus."

Why is it that the present age differs so radically from its predecessors in its attitude to its ancestry? Why its sudden break with, its drastic departure from, its own traditions, its light-hearted and adventurous abandonment of its heritage? Why does it so cheerily contemplate complete substitution instead of, as has been the programme of revolutionaries hitherto, amelioration and advance? To compare great things with small, Christianity assimilated the antique world in transforming it. The Renaissance was manifestly not a *naissance*; the Reformation as plainly not a fresh formation. The Revolution was retrospective as well as inventive and, enriching its imagination with culture, justified its most energetic phases by the appeal to reason rather than to pure energy



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— which indeed it regulated radically enough. The present ochlocratic expansion, modified only by concentration upon securing expansion for others and contemptuous of results achieved even to this end by any former experience, is so striking because it is in no wise a phase of traceable evolution but is so marked a variation from type.

The cause is to be found, no doubt, in the immense extension in our time of what may be called the intellectual and æsthetic electorate, in which, owing to education either imperfect or highly specialized, genuine culture has become less general; with the result that the intellect, which has standards, has lost co-operative touch with the susceptibility and the will, which have not, but whose activities are vastly more seductive as involving not only less tension, but often no tension at all.



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For the instinctive hostility to standards proceeds from the tension which conformity imposes both on the artist who produces and the public which appreciates. Hence the objection to standards as conventions, and to conventions as in conflict with the spontaneity which is a corollary of our energetic vitality. Conventions they certainly are, and the epithet "conventional" has doubtless earned the odium it has realized. But it is a mark of naïveté to object to conventions as such. Criticism may properly analyze them in examining their title to validity in the disputed cases with which it is a considerable part of the function of criticism to deal. But no one has heretofore maintained that there are not useful conventions. Those of the stage for instance are even necessary. Those of ornament, even structural ornament, hardly less



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so. In fact the foundations of the edifice in the roomy upper stories of which the artist works and the public enjoys are based on conventions tested by the application of principles by criticism and established as sound. Conventions that are standards are, in a word, not conventions merely. And the more securely and unconsciously both artist and public can rest on them without constant verification of their ready-reckoner, as Carlyle puts it, the less strain will there be on spontaneity of an elevated instead of an elementary order and on the appreciation of its exercise. Any one whose spontaneity is unable to find scope for its exercise in these upper stories, or is unprepared by the requisite preliminary discipline to cope with the competition he finds there, and who in consequence undertakes to reconstruct the established foundations of the splen-



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did structure of letters and art, will assuredly need all the vitality that even a child of the twentieth century is likely to possess.



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movement by the incoherency of personal obstreperousness. This solvent has disintegrated the force as well as the decorum of our public, and made it clear that the agency of which art and letters now stand in most urgent need is a public with standards to which they may appeal and by which they may be constrained.

A detached observer must admit, however, that they seem less likely to get it than they have been heretofore, since the changes that have taken place in our own generation have been in the direction of enfeebling this public by extension and dissipating its concentrated influence by diversification. Democracy — to which, so far as art and letters are concerned, any advocate who does not conceive it as largely the spread in widest commonalty of aristocratic virtues is a traitor — has largely become a self-



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authenticating cult, as antagonistic as *Kultur* to culture, and many of its devotees now mainly illustrate aristocratic vices: arrogance, contemptuousness, intolerance, obscurantism. Terribly little learning is enough to incur the damnatory title of "high-brow." The connoisseur is deemed a dilettante and the dilettante a snob, fastidiousness being conceived as necessarily affectation and not merely evincing defective sympathies but actively mean. "People desire to popularize art," said Manet, "without perceiving that art always loses in height what it gains in breadth." If Molière, who spoke of his *métier* as the business of making *les honnêtes gens* laugh, had only practised on his cook, which he is said to have also done, "we should perhaps have had," observes M. André Gide, "more 'Fourberies de Scapin' and other 'Monsieur de Pourceaug-



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of art and literature that satisfies its pangs shares its quality as well as responding quantitatively to its exorbitant needs.

The colleges no longer provide the community with an educated class in the sense in which they used to. They are greatly increased in number and prodigiously in size, but their graduates taken in the mass are furnished with a different equipment. There has been a marked advance in the various branches of learning conveniently to be grouped under the head of science, and there is undoubtedly much more scholarship of any and all kinds in the country than ever before. Its contributions to the literature of all subjects of study have an undoubted and new importance, increasingly recognized abroad, for example. The technical side of the art of writing has been effectively studied and popularized so



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that all manner of public questions social and political are discussed not only competently but effectively by writers who as writers have no established position. The text-book literature is enormous and the volume of collateral reading allied with it correspondingly large. The vast population teaching and being taught is portentous. Summer as well as winter the round proceeds without intermission for both sexes and all ages. Art and letters never before received a tithe of the general attention now bestowed on them. Every other painter has classes, every college its art courses, every English Department its seminars in short-story or play writing. Add the output of the common schools and the American educational conspectus becomes almost grotesquely impressive. The proportion it bears to the increase of population, however, is



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a qualifying consideration, the obviously superficial character of much of it is another, the encroachment of business on the professions in a rising ratio with every college class graduated, a third. Vocational training has ravaged the cloisters of the cultural disciplines. The classics have disappeared before the universal passion for preparing, as Arnold observed, "to fight the battle of life with the waiters in foreign hotels." And certainly not the least hostile influence to the cultural unification of a public thus miscellaneously educated is the absorption of its most serious elements in the various special studies whose only common bond is an indifference to general culture. If Darwin could lose his interest in poetry through devotion to natural science, it can hardly be expected that the courses which now dominate our curriculums will



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fail to have a similar effect, except in so far as they are less seriously pursued.

To expect literary and art standards of such a public as this — incontestably superior as it is I think, in other ways, and especially as it appears to the eye of hope! — is visionary. What does such a public ask of arts and letters? It asks sensation. Hence its exorbitant demand for novelty, which more surely than anything else satisfies the craving for sensation, and which accordingly is so generally accepted at its face value. The demand is impolitic because the supply is disproportionately small. An ounce of alcohol will give the world a new aspect, but one is supposed to be better without it if for no other reason because a little later two ounces are needed, and when the limits of capacity are reached the original staleness of things appears intensified. Undoubtedly letters and art suffer at the present time



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from the effort to satisfy an over-stimulated appetite which only extravagance can appease. The demand is also unphilosophic because novelty is of necessity transitory and the moment it ceases to be so it is no longer novel. The epithet "different," for example, now so generally employed as the last word of laudation, we should hasten to make the most of while it lasts; some little child, like the one in Andersen's story of "The Two Cheats," is sure ere long to ask how it is synonymous with "preferable." And in losing its character novelty inevitably of course loses its charm. Nothing is more grotesque than last year's fashions. Fashions having no standards they appear in reminiscence in sharp stereotype, and following them seems stark slavery. Ceasing to be novel they disclose their lack of quality. In fine the passion for novelty blinds its victim to the



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distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic, which is all the more important for being elementary. It would be idle to deny the sanctions of the extrinsic, but it is obvious that in this case they are altogether subjective. If our public would once admit that the element of novelty in anything has nothing whatever to do with the value of the object, it might reflect usefully on the value of the mind that considers the object, with the result of coming to perceive on the one hand that all that can be asked of the object is to possess intrinsic value, and on the other that it is very much its own business to justify the value of its novel sensations. This may easily be below standard, like the pugnacity of the chivalrous soul who had only heard of the Crucifixion the day before.

Carlyle, reading the Scriptures while presiding at family prayers in the home



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of an absent friend and, encountering the line, "Is there any taste in the white of an egg?" exclaiming, to the consternation of the household, "Bless my soul, I didn't know that was in Job!" exhibits a surprise of different quality from that of Emerson's small boy who, laboriously learning the alphabet and having the letter pointed out to him, exclaimed, "The devil, is that 'Z'!" It has a richer background — a background Carlyle himself needed when, announcing that he didn't consider Titian of great importance, he earned Thackeray's retort that the fact was of small importance with regard to Titian but of much with regard to Thomas Carlyle. So on those occasions, admittedly rare, when candor compels crudity to confess to culture, "I never thought of that," or "What surprises me about Shakespeare is his modernness," what cul-



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ture feels is the lack of standards implied in the lack of background disclosed. "How do you manage to invent those hats?" inquired a friend of the comedian Hyacinthe. "I don't invent them," replied the actor, "I keep them."

One need not be learned in its hats to value the light a knowledge of the past throws on the present. Even to despise the conventional intelligently, one should know its *raison d'être*. As a matter of fact the current dislike of it is largely based on ignorance. How violate precedent with complete satisfaction without a real acquaintance with it? What wasted opportunities for iconoclastic delight, what neglected possibilities of destructive activity lie behind the veil which for the uneducated conceals the standardized tradition. If, on the other hand, any feeble apostle of the new



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spirit should balk at the general disposition to revolt for its own sake and maintain that mere neglect of precedent and confining oneself to the positive business of personal expression without regard to either following or defying precedent is the path to true originality, how is one to know that he is not essentially respecting, or in the case of our geniuses repeating, some masterpiece of the unvalued past? In such a case those who do know can hardly be blamed for taking a different kind of interest from his own in his self-expression. *They* may rank his performance intelligently, but how can he? His work may be good but his philosophy must be false. In strict logic therefore only familiarity with the standards of achievement can justify the radical iconoclast to himself. A little general learning has come to be a useful thing in a world where



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from its infrequency it has ceased to be dangerous and where the thirsty drink deep but taste not the Pierian spring.

Even subjectively considered the charm of novelty has no greater claim than that of familiarity. Real value in the cause once given — without which appreciation of its novelty is valueless, since every one must acknowledge that to admire what is inferior *merely* because it is novel would lower the most elementary of standards — familiarity is as admirable a sensation as novelty. I think myself it is in better taste, but an inclination to one or the other is no doubt a matter of temperament. Old things of value newly felt and newly presented, new things of value aptly introduced, have their own abundant warrant, which it would be stupid to contest. St. Paul relied on the Athenians'



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open-mindedness in this respect to second his zeal for their spiritual welfare, and St. Augustine confesses charmingly the charm he felt in the fugitive beauties of new aspects of nature. Scherer has an admirable passage in eulogy of freshness of view and expression — in high differentiation, of course, which is the whole point. No one would deny the repulsiveness of the commonplace, the trite, the fusty, or the unprofitableness of the stale and flat. In fact the clamor for novelty has itself already reached the stage at which it enters this category. But familiarity in what is admirable has an equal authentication. The richer the mind, the more it delights in associations; the more undisciplined the temper, the more it chafes at them as at best immaterial. *Toujours perdrix* contains a warning for the intellectual palate, but this organ has other sources



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of satisfaction than variety; for example, Alonso of Aragon's "Old wood to burn, old wine to drink, old friends to trust, old authors to read." "What novelty," says George Eliot, "is worth that sweet monotony where everything is known, and *loved* because it is known?" Deprivation of it often brings out its real quality with unexpected sharpness. The prodigal son no doubt found a solace in the old environment which had escaped the notice of his elder brother, and perhaps it is still greater experience with husks that our public chiefly needs to teach it the attractiveness of the familiar that is established — not causelessly — and wean it from the pursuit of the untried, the untested, and accordingly the problematical. At all events, by definition novelty can have no standards and consequently the love of it though it may characterize cannot



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constitute a public as distinct from the individuals that materially compose it. And it is so much the most prominent as fairly to seem the only common characteristic that with regard to art and letters our public possesses.

A sound philosophy, however, is no more than general culture, the desideratum of an emotional age, and it is not difficult to trace our depreciation of the former to a popular recoil from disciplined thought, in itself emotional, and of the latter to the purely emotional extension which our democratic tradition has of late so remarkably acquired. One of the results has been the wide-spread feeling that intellectual standards are undemocratic, as excluding the greenhorn and the ignoramus from sympathies now extended to the sinner and the criminal—who have assuredly a different title



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to them, belonging at least to a different order of unfortunates. How otherwise account for the diffusion of popular discussion of literary and art, as well as social and political, themes among the inexpert, whose interest in them is taken as evidence of the spread of intelligence, though it is an interest which would cease if confronted by subjection to intelligent standards? The less the science of these themes is understood, the more opportunity for the *voces et præterea nihil*, now so audible and often so eloquent in their exposition. One of the commonest of current phenomena is the emotional preoccupation of intelligent but unenriched minds, in instinctive revolt against traditional standards, with *res non judicatæ*, things yet to be adjudged, reading nothing else, for example — save fiction, of course — and showing in consequence less augmen-



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tation of mental furniture than the results of prolonged emotional stimulation.

A public of which a large element feels in this way is bound to make few demands of knowledge in its artists and authors—even in its writers of fiction! Accordingly one must admit that in the field of fiction—bewilderingly populous at the present time—our later writers, excelling in whatever way they may, nevertheless differ most noticeably from their European contemporaries in possessing less of the knowledge which is power here as elsewhere. They are certainly not less clever any more than their public is less clever than the European public. But every one is clever nowadays. We are perhaps suffering from a surfeit of cleverness, since being merely clever it is impossible to be clever enough. Our cleverness is apt to stop



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short of imagination and rest contentedly in invention, forgetful of Shelley's reminder that the Muses were the daughters of Memory. Columbus himself invented nothing, but the children of his discovery have imperfectly shared the ruling passion to which they owe their existence. New discoveries in life are hardly to be expected of those who take its portrayal so lightly as to neglect its existing maps and charts. And this is why our current fiction seems so experimental, so speculative, so amateur in its portrayal of life, why it seems so immature in one word, compared grade for grade with that of Europe. The contrast is as sensible in a page as in a volume in any confrontation of the two.

I know of no English short-story writer of her rank who gives me the positive delight that Miss Edna Fer-



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ber does — or did. But why should we play *all* the time? Why should we bracket O. Henry's immensely clever "expanded anecdotes," as Mrs. Gerould calls them, with the incisive cameos carved out of the very substance of life taken seriously, however limitedly, of a consummate artist like Maupassant? Such fixed stars of our fiction as Henry James and Mr. Howells are perfectly comparable with their European coevals, but I am speaking of the present day — not of the day before yesterday whose horoscope, so rapid are our changes, is already superseded. And how are we to have a standard of culture, of solidity, of intellectual seriousness, in fine, as exacting as that to which a Swiss or a Scandinavian novelist is held, a standard to which such rather solitary writers as Mrs. Wharton in prose and Mrs. Dargan in poetry, having the



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requisite talent and equipment, instinctively conform, if our public is so given over to the elation of emotion as to frown impatiently on any intellectual standard of severity, or, owing to its dread of conventionality, on any common standard whatever? An enthusiastic writer, herself a poet, speaks ecstatically of "the unprecedented magnificence of this modern era, the unprecedented emotion of this changing world," as if the two were interdependent, which I dare say they are, but also as if mercurial emotion were a better thing than constancy, which is more doubtful, or as if unprecedented emotion were a good thing in itself, whereas it is probably bad for the health. Orderly evolution — which is at least spared the retesting of its exclusions — is unsatisfactory to the impatient, desirous of changing magnificence. It involves such long periods that we can hardly speak of



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its abruptest phases as unprecedented unless they occur as "sports," which are indeed immune from the virus of precedent. However, it is quite right to talk of this changing world and, since it is so changing, difficult to talk of it long — except in the language of emotion. Otherwise than emotionally one is impelled to consider its shiftings as related to the standards of what is stable, which is just what it objects to. Hence the difficulty its apostles and its critics have in getting together about it.

To assign to art and letters the work of transforming æsthetically the representative public of an era like this is to set them a task of a difficulty that would deject Don Quixote and dismay Mrs. Partington. There remains the alternative of increasing the "remnant." Of the undemocratic doctrine of the "remnant" in the social and political field I have never, myself,



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felt either the aptness or the attraction. The interests of people in general are not those of the remnant, and history shows how, unchecked, the remnant administers them. Except in a few fundamentals they are less matters of principle than matters of adjustment. And the attractiveness of the doctrine must be measured by the character of the remnant itself — in our case certainly hardly worth the sacrifice of the rest of the nation to achieve. But the remnant in art and letters is another affair altogether. It cannot be too largely increased at whatever sacrifices; and the only way in which it can be increased is by the spread of its standards. Otherwise art and letters will be deprived of the public which is their stimulus and their support and be reduced to that which subjects them to the satisfaction of standardless caprice.



### III

#### TASTE

A HETEROGENEOUS public at one chiefly in its passion for novelty may easily have the vitality it vaunts, but there is one quality which ineluctably it must forego: namely, taste. I hasten to acknowledge that it reconciles itself with readiness to this deprivation and depreciates taste with the sincerity inseparable from the instinct for self-preservation. Certainly there are ideals of more importance, and if the sacrifice of taste were needed for their success it would be possible to deplore its loss too deeply. We may be sure, however, that the alternative is fundamentally fanciful. The remark once



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made of an American dilettante of distinction that he had convictions in matters of taste, and tastes in matters of conviction, implies, it is true, an exceptional rather than a normal attitude. But though it is quite needless to confound the two categories, it is still quite possible to extend considerably the conventional confines of taste without serious encroachment on the domain of convictions. Nothing is in better taste than piety, for example. And since also nothing is more fundamental, any one in search of an explanation of our present wide-spread antipathy to taste as outworn and unvital might do worse than scrutinize the various psychological changes that have accompanied the much-talked-of decline of, at least formal, religion and the transformation, at any rate, of the spirit of conformity to carefully and not capriciously constructed credos.



## TASTE.

Taste indeed is essentially a matter of tradition. No one originates his own. Of the many instances in which mankind is wiser than any man it is one of the chief. It implies conformity to standards already crystallized from formulæ already worked out. In the famous preface of his "Cromwell" Victor Hugo asserted, to be sure, that an admirable work might be composed of all that the arid breath of *gens de goût* from Scudéry to La Harpe had dried up in its germ. But he referred to the pedantries of professional classic criticism rather than to the fastidiousness of a sensitive public. The preface long ago became itself the classic statement of the case for romanticism and established standards of its own. All that it contains is no doubt useful to remember, though it is rather sentimental than profitable speculation to dwell on the mute and



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inglorious of country churchyards, and one may excusably take a more cheerful view of the consequences resulting from the interposition of the *chevaux de frise* of pure conventions, even, between the otherwise unprotected public and the crowd of candidates for its favor.

Of Hugo himself Renan, a better judge in this particular, observed that "he had not time to possess taste." He offered compensations for the deficiency, it must be acknowledged, but to the very considerable number of writers who can hardly hope to equal him in this respect the cultivation of taste may none the less be commended. They can more easily afford the required time. Renan even, compact of taste as he was, lost touch with it occasionally — in the "Abbesse de Jouarre," for instance, and perhaps also in meriting Doudan's remark:



## TASTE

"I know of no theologian with a more intimate knowledge of Oriental flora." And taste has the great advantage of being cultivable. There is nothing recondite about it. It is a quality particularly proper to the public as distinct from the artist. Indeed its possession by the public provides the artist with precisely the constraint he most needs and is most apt to forget — especially in the day of so-called "free art." It cannot be acquired of course without co-operation; and it involves the effort needed to acquire and is not fostered by the emotion that is an end in itself. At the present time, accordingly, its pursuit is attended with the discomfort inherent in the invidious. It is particularly ironical to pass one's life, as doubtless is still done now and then, in regretting that one knows so little and at the same time arouse disgust



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for knowing so much. The remnant, if extended, will have to be of martyr stuff but it need fear no compunctions if it is tempted into occasional reprisal, consoled by Rivarol's reflection: "No one thinks of how much pain any man of taste has had to suffer before he gives any."

Our own public has always been a little exceptionally sensitive about the limitations of taste, even in days when it more generally possessed it. But currently we merely exaggerate a neglect of it that is wide-spread. One thinks, of course, of France. It is not to be denied that in France the democratic spirit with its associated anarchy has invaded the composure of the taste which, in the æsthetic field, more than any other element constitutes French superiority. Our own extravagances and incoherences in this definite field are apt to be re-



## TASTE

flections of similar French phenomena. Paris itself, still the finest civic spectacle ever secured by the co-operation of natural growth and express design, shows in spots and details an attenuation of decorum and conformity — shows the corrosion of the spirit of “free art.” In France, however, æsthetic standards are unlikely to be permanently deposed by fanaticism or forgotten by obtuseness. They are constantly recalled to the sense by the models that embody them, and constantly recur to the reflection of minds insensibly more or less moulded by the tradition they define. Moreover the principles that underlie them are constantly reuttered by voices less noisy than penetrating but thoroughly national in sounding the overtones of culture however “advanced” the air, and in exhibiting an aristocratic quality even in chanting the most popu-



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lar pæan. There is, besides, running through the currents and eddies of the moment, which boil rather than flow, a clear stream of temperamentally conservative criticism, that clarifies and purifies and carries along to the ocean of general appreciation the sweetness without the sediment of the troubled waters through which it passes, while at the same time it tranquilly transports its own freight of principles and standards.

In other words, in France the current era has its *esprits délicats* as well as its fanatics. And they are of their era and not merely in it. With us perhaps criticism which accepts standards is less sensitively, less sympathetically, discriminating in its treatment of whatever flouts or forgets them. Mr. Mather, in his indulgence for the *poètes maudits*, for the abnormal, for what he calls "disorderly geniuses"



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and "unbalanced talents" (see his illuminating chapter on the egregious Greco), is distinctly exceptional. Our conservatives are, in general, quite flat-footed. They resemble rather Professor Conrad Wright who in his "History of French Literature" — exhilaratingly, I think — announces himself a convinced classicist, or even Mr. Cox who in his suggestive and above all timely book has been thought to confound the classic spirit with the academic. Let him not be disquieted. Mr. Dougherty tells me that Matisse is fundamentally academic. On the other hand flat-footed is a faint epithet with which to characterize our "advanced" critics, who wring all withers when they are making the academic jade wince.

In contrast take M. André Gide. He is particularly open-minded, though he has plenty of temperamental pre-



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dilections, and is quite in accord with the present revolt against the romantic without being in the least a neo-classicist. His "modernity" in a word is unimpeachable by all save the partisans to whom modernity and *l'esprit délicat* are by hypothesis antithetical. From these however his implicit subscription to standards in his professed exclusive devotion to the principle of taste does definitely distinguish him, and for the purpose of showing this I condense a few felicitous sentences from one of his *conférences*:

"Beauty is secured only by an artificial constraint. Art is always the result of constraint. To believe that the freer it is the higher it rises is to believe that what keeps the kite from mounting is the string. Art aspires to freedom only in morbid periods. It loves to burst its bonds. Therefore it chooses close ones. . . . The



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great artist is he to whom the obstacle serves as a spring-board."

And referring to the "art for art" art of the day he speaks of it as "insolently isolating itself" and "fatuously despising what it is too ignorant to evaluate"; of the artist as one who without external control is fatally driven to "seek only his own approbation"; and of the critic, his congener, as "judging works in the name of his personal taste and the greater or less pleasure they give him," which he manifestly considers a severe indictment. But irresponsibility is an old story in criticism. Its invasion of the far wider field of art in general is otherwise significant. It is no more needful than possible or even desirable that every one should be a competent critic of art and letters. As well ask that every reader should be a writer or every writer a writer of criti-



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cism. But it is desirable that every one who counts at all, every reader of real books and every one seriously interested in plastic art should have standards of taste and possess them so thoroughly as to apply them instinctively and rigorously. Otherwise there is no logical escape from the prospect that the wider the appetite for books and art becomes the more superficial will be its appreciation and the more worthless will be the production that appeals to it directly and intimately reflects its easy and ordinary reactions.

It is a mistake to suppose that self-expression without self-control and enjoyment without standards of value are consonant with the effort that is a prerequisite to real achievement in either accomplishment or appreciation. Undisciplined self-expression riots in the absence of general taste, and the



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less exaction the writer experiences in the reader, the less effort he expends in rewarding or even securing his attention. The less demanded by the beholder of the picture, the statue, the building, the quicker the artist's sag into inertia. Ineptitude may easily be quite as genuine as significance, and if genuineness is the only demand public taste makes of the artist, if he is required to meet no standards or — what at this stage of the world's progress is the same thing — to neglect all models, the quality of his supply is bound to deteriorate in accordance with as fatal a law as that which makes water run down-hill.

What most opposes, however, the advancement of this salutary element of exacting taste in our public is the vigor of the spirit of non-conformity, which by definition has no standards, and which is no longer the affair of



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temperament it used to be but is a conscious ideal. As such of course, in an emotional era, pursued with passion, it is also pursued into details of high differentiation — manners, tastes, preferences, fastidious predilections. To the new theology, the new sincerity, the new poetry and painting, the new everything in fact will ultimately no doubt be added the new refinement, the new decorum. Meantime our non-conformists are concentrated upon vilipending the old. This is a field in which the new egotism may assert itself with the minimum of effort involved in mere talk — talk that asserts an independence of conventions marked by positive fanaticism. Gibbon notes with his accustomed perspicacity the affinity of independence for fanaticism, in remarking the hostility of fanaticism to superstition — the bugbear of the present time. “The



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independent spirit of fanaticism," he says in his chapter on Mahomet, "looks down with contempt on the ministers and slaves of superstition," and the remark explains the current Islamic invasion of the reticences of life. Given her undeniably fanatical independence, for example, it is easy to see why the contemporary young girl of the thoughtful variety is so shocked by the constitution of society as it is, as to vary her impassioned sympathy for the street-walker by grinding her teeth at the thought of the Sunday-school. But is it not a rather literal logic that leads her to involve the purely decorative elements with the structure of the civilization that has produced her? Why, for instance, should she be "thrilled" by reading, why should she herself write, that not inconsiderable part of the detail of the latest fiction that is else



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too colorless to have any other motive than the purely protestant one of heartening the robust by revolting the refined? The motive is as obvious in trivial as in grave examples, since both may be equally gross so far as taste is concerned. Observe this picture in a recent clever novel — by a lady — that has evoked a very general chorus of cordial appreciation. Two young men, one an Oxonian, occupy conjointly a room in a foreign seaside hotel:

“‘I got out of bed,’ said Hewet vaguely, ‘merely to talk, I suppose.’

“‘Meanwhile I shall undress,’ said Hirst. When naked of all but his shirt and bent over the basin, Mr. Hirst no longer impressed one with the majesty of his intellect, but with the pathos of his young yet ugly body.

“‘Women interest me,’ said Hewet.



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“‘They’re so stupid,’ said Hirst. ‘You’re sitting on my pyjamas.’

“‘I suppose they *are* stupid,’ Hewet wondered.

“‘There can’t be two opinions about that, I imagine,’ said Hirst, hopping briskly across the room, ‘unless you’re in love — that fat woman Warrington?’ he inquired.

“‘Not one fat woman — all fat women,’ Hewet sighed.

“‘The women I saw to-night were not fat,’ said Hirst, who was taking advantage of Hewet’s company to cut his toe-nails.”

A moment later:

“‘I wonder if this is what they call an ingrowing toe-nail?’ said Hirst, examining the big toe on his left foot.”

Another brief interval.

“Hewet contemplated the angular young man who was neatly brushing



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the rims of his toe-nails into the fireplace in silence for a moment.

“‘I respect you, Hirst,’ he remarked.”

Is there anything in “Tom Jones” that strikes quite that note? The picture is manifestly less a gem of *genre* than a defiance of decorum, and as such perhaps “stimulates” those who would find a dialogue between Achilles and Patroclus insipid. The writer and the sympathetic reader occupy an attitude which for them, of course, illustrates the new sincerity but for others constitutes the spectacle of a pose, preoccupied with producing an effect while unconscious of what it exemplifies. Obviously its sincerity, though flaunted, is not fundamentally newer than the fall of man, and is but a variant of the desire to, as the French say, *épater le bourgeois*. The new sincerity presents more drastic



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though not, I think, more disintegrating phenomena. But one must draw the line somewhere and it is decorous to draw it on the hither side of the purlieus of pornography, whiffs of whose un-Arabian breezes no one can have escaped and whither accordingly in any consideration of twentieth-century fiction it would, though easy, be profitless, because superfluous, to proceed. Here at least one may pay the tribute of a wistful regret to those days, distant in all respects but that of time, in which it could be said of even the dilettante who had only tastes in matters of conviction that he had in any case convictions in matters of taste.

Dress affords a more agreeable field of reflection and has the advantage for our purpose of illustrating the same phenomenon of impatience with standards of decorum. Here we can



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see how superficial it is to denounce the insufficiency of old standards for the new duties taught by new occasions, and perceive how much more consistent it is to demand the abolition of standards altogether. In a word, how fashions differ from standards, and how exacting is the tyranny which replaces the slavery of convention with the despotism of whim. The aspect of "this changing world" presented by its habiliments is indeed such as to arouse "unprecedented emotion." Already, to be sure, there are signs of even more change, but since it is manifestly to be progressive instead of purely haphazard we know whither we are drifting and that the need for purely emotional appreciation will remain stable. The current affinity of the bottom of the skirt for that of the *décolletage* is destined no doubt to a richer realization, owing



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to what we are now calling an "intensive" conviction of the truth that "the body is more than raiment." And as we are to be, above all things, natural and as, except for artists, the female form is the loveliest thing in nature, we not only have the prospect of still further emotional felicity in the immediate future, but may look forward with the gentle altruism of resignation to the increase of mankind's stock of happiness in a remoter hereafter — in the spirit of the French seer, who, on the eve of the Revolution, exclaimed: "*Les jeunes gens sont bien heureux ; ils verront de belles choses.*" We know how Madame Tallien justified him.

Undress, too, as well as dress, holds out an alluring prospect, at least in fiction, in which the imagination is already very considerably "stimulated" by what the eye is condemned



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to forego in fact. No community has, of course, as yet adopted the Virgilian motto half-heartedly suggested by Hawthorne for Brook Farm: *Nudus ara, sere nudus*, but fiction may be said to front that way. Mr. Galsworthy is only the most distinguished of those who enable their readers to emulate Actæon at their ease, and we are constantly assisting at the bath of beauty in company with lady novelists to whom the experience must naturally seem less sensational, but who are especially sensitive to the desirability of being "in the swim," if not reckless of becoming what Shelley calls "naked to laughter" in the process.

Nor will our successors be confined to the delights of the eye. The world of sensation is acquiring among us, in various ways, a new extension, as our fiction, again, amply shows. The par-



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ticular sense of smell, for example, is being rescued from neglect and receiving a recognition long withheld by puritan fastidiousness. Its inspiration proceeds less from Keats's example or Max Beerbohm's advocacy, perhaps, than from Maupassant, whom our later fictionists wisely study, I believe, without always studying wisely, and of whom Henry James remarks that "human life in his pages appears for the most part as a concert of odors," owing to a sense of smell "as acute as that of those animals of the field and forest whose subsistence and security depend upon it." The heroine of an essentially charming recent novel has "a moment" that "was forever connected in her mind with the smell of delicate food and fading flowers and human beings well washed and groomed which floated out to her from the dining-



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room." Every one knows the persistent associations of odors, and the house-party was a large one. Besides people wash much more than they used to and their aura deserves more attention. However the negligent are not neglected. The young lady, whose father is a socialist, has already had an experience of a different sort — the odor of a showy hotel court in which "everything in sight exhaled an intense consciousness of high cost . . . suggesting to a sensitive nose another smell, obscured but rancidly perceptible — the unwashed smell floating up from the paupers' cellars which support Aladdin's palaces of luxury." Taste may surely be too rigid and in any case its limits include those temperamental preferences which, like colors, are proverbially exempt from disputation. No doubt there is more gain than loss in



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enlisting a new sense in the service of literature. But it would be fatuity to expect it to conserve its freshness long. Odors evaporate. This kind of spontaneity is especially in danger of prompt conventionalization — like any new perfume — its *raison d'être* being too obscure to be kept vividly in mind and the sensuous satisfaction it affords tending rapidly to lose its edge in becoming staple. And there would be much more prospect of its serving the ends of taste in general if what is staple were also standard.



## IV

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THE staple is often however far from being standard. Nearly two generations ago Arnold cited Renan as saying: "All ages have had their inferior literature but the great danger of our time is that this inferior literature tends more and more to get the upper place." Applied to our own time the remark would lose none of its justice. It would need indeed a sharper edge in view of one particular phase which not only the literary movement but the whole intellectual flux has assumed since Renan's day and which with all his pessimistic distrust of democracy Renan himself could not have foreseen in its acuteness. This phase is marked



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not merely by the numerical preponderance of mediocrity, which alone he and kindred spirits deplored — almost cravenly as it seemed at the time — but by mediocrity invigorated by the current aimless yet abounding vitality, which gives it a force mediocrity heretofore has never even conceived of itself as possessing. Ours is the day of the majority but there is nothing invidious in ascribing mediocrity to the majority in the intellectual sphere. One may acknowledge it with the same wry frankness with which Thackeray discoursed of snobs. As Henley, who certainly did not suffer from morbid self-disparagement, once wrote me: "We are all too damnably second-rate." What is new is the extraordinary self-respect that mediocrity has suddenly acquired.

It is no doubt as an unconscious corollary of the quickened sense of the



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dignity of the individual as such — something which can hardly perhaps be too much insisted on in the social and political field — that in the intellectual field also the individual as such is felt to have his rights. The new humanity should add a chapter about it, to bring its gospel up to date. Democracy is to my sense the finest thing in the secular world, but in a *cosmic* universe there is a place for everything and it should keep its place. For it is not after all the more obvious characteristics of our public considered as a whole — its heterogeneousness, its instinctive preference of the novel to the standardized and its restive recalcitrancy to the restrictions of taste — that give the cause of art and letters at the present time an especial claim on our attention. Considered in the mass a mercurial public may conspicuously fail in its duty to this



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cause, but being mercurial it is susceptible of transformation. The character of the individuals composing it is the more fundamental consideration. And this is something that is forced on our attention more frequently and more forcibly than the general traits which it requires more effort to synthetize.

The modern individual is, to begin with, under some misconception as to his own nature which he has somehow come to conceive as that of a highly organized personality. Reflection would assure him however that mere individuality is a matter of the will, personality of the character. One can be propagated by mere fission; the other cannot even be inherited. One synthetizes individual traits; the other divides without distinguishing one individual from another — sheep, for example. Unlike



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individualism which is a doctrine, personality cannot be preached; legitimately there is no such word as "personalism." In a work of art, it has been observed, personality is not what you put in but what you can't keep out. One opposes the standardization which the other eludes. Though the impression made by each must be measured by standards of value, they differ constitutionally as the independent spirit differs from the intuitive. Thus personality not only need lose none of its character but may even intensify its force in the conformity that independence feels as a fetter. Raphael's personality is as accentuated as Blake's, Torquemada's energy as great as Luther's. Individualism as such is shut off from following ideals that are not less attractive for having attracted others. Personality is surely the most inter-



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esting, the ultimate element of any form of expression. It begins where the others leave off. To prescribe it, however, is absurd, since to define it is impossible. In character it is an abstraction equally applicable to all personalities and concretely as uncharacterizable as its phenomena are apparent; imponderable as a perfume, impalpable as a presence. On the other hand its extreme attenuation or even its complete absence is quite as conspicuous in many individuals whose claims to its possession are aggressively asserted. I have labored the point because it is in virtue of his assumed personality — always an exceptional possession — that the modern individual — who is not exceptional at all — asserts his title to a special sanction for his activities in either production or appreciation.

Naturally independence is his cen-



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tral ideal, which incidentally accounts for the disintegration of the public he composes. He deems it his duty to live his own life, to do his own thinking — unaware of the handicap he involuntarily assumes in doing so. When Arnold observed that “man worships best in common; he philosophizes best alone,” what he had in mind was that it is best to do one’s thinking in solitude — solitude rather than independence. Thinking for oneself meant to him that neglect of the thinking of others which produces less the thinker than the thinkist — to adopt a useful distinction; a result that his prescription of culture, which he defined as the knowledge of others’ thinking, was particularly designed to prevent. The subject in fact suggested to him the anecdote of Mrs. Shelley exclaiming to a friend who advised her to send her son to a school where he would be



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taught to think for himself: "Oh, my God! send him where they will teach him to think like other people." One can understand that Mrs. Shelley should speak feelingly. As to worship we have to a very considerable extent replaced the communion of the saints, of which Arnold was undoubtedly thinking, by a division of the community into two distinct and interhostile sects of secular schismatics, one adoring the golden calf and the other incensing the under dog. Naturally for standards that unite we have shibboleths that divide. But when we come to philosophizing around and across this central line of cleavage the independence of our thinking is fatal to conformity in far greater detail. We fairly whirl in centrifugal discussion which contemplates agreement as little as it achieves it. The evil of repressing free thought is felt at once,



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but the blessings of encouraging it are largely reserved for Bacon's "next ages," owing to its deliquescence in free speech. The spirit of the forum has invaded the household, where, however, even forensic standards cower before the eminently unparliamentary contentiousness concentrated around the hearth.

All this is of course marked by vitality but it is permitted to hope that uncrystallized by standards it may not prove viable. It may yet crumble in dissatisfaction under some sudden illumination of our prevailing self-adoring introspection. Arnold himself employed a short and easy formula of consolation when depressed by the way the world was going. "The instinct for self-preservation in humanity" would, he thought, ultimately reorient it. Unhappily some of the effects of Emerson's law of compen-



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sation are to be counted on only by deferred hope and in the longest of long runs. The forces of disintegration, in which individual independence is disguised only from itself by the cloak of socialist theory, have an indefinite future before them if they consolidate by still greater numbers the conquests their numbers have already made in virtue not of their quality but of their numerousness.

The proverbial egotism of the young, to whom no doubt the world's progress is chiefly due, is perhaps a source of strength to them in their work of amelioration and advance. Modesty is doubt, says Balzac, and egotism gives them the requisite confidence in a world largely given over to the *grosso modo* in its struggles upward. But the most sympathetic observer of their attitude and activities at the present time must note a fundamental



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change in this advantageous quality — a transformation of force into ferocity modified by fatuousness. The old feel the effects of this in many pathetic ways inevitable in the supplanting of general standards by egoistic ideals. It is a common experience that the domestic affections suffer from it. The Gospel conflict of the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law is a customary and chronic affair compared with the current cleavage between entire generations—in its completeness an altogether new thing, I think, under the sun. The domestic conflict is no doubt a derivative of our highly individualist predatory socialism, whose admirable sentimental humanity is rationally so markedly modified by the natural man's very natural desire for a share in the plutocrat's "swag," and whose disintegrating disposition to substi-



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tute the individual for the family as the social unit follows the injunction to be off with the old love before being on with the new so enthusiastically as to kick it down-stairs before even dissembling its love. This seems less prudent but more logical than are our belligerent pacifists, its congeners, who are for having men fall into the arms—and apparently the ammunition—of their brothers abroad while continuing to dynamite their enemies at home. But in sacrificing to the individual, one the family and the other the nation, both illustrate the same egotistic tendency.

The fireside conflict is noticeably embittered by the failure of youth to consider how much more crowded the pigeonholes of age are than its own, and how much more irksome it is, accordingly, to rearrange their contents; and by the failure of age to



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bear in mind that principle of pleasing which renders it necessary, as Scherer observes, to learn many things that one knows from those who are ignorant of them. The old will yield, victims of a feeblar egotism, encumbered with standards prohibiting self-regardant ideals, less concerned about living their own lives and preserving their sacrosanct individualities than haunted by dread of losing the love of their loved ones, and even in their benefactions sceptical about any real presence in the stone of "free verse" and "free art" proffered now so prodigally to those asking for bread. Æsthetic activity as an alleviation of the ills of the proletariat they find a baffling conception. And they instinctively shy at the "free living" of which they have never experienced the delights and have only observed the disadvantages. They must also



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very generally be hamstrung by compunction, reflecting whose fault it all largely is. The mother whose child a visitor noticed hacking the furniture and who replied with composure to the latter's concern about it that the child was "merely expressing herself," merely herself illustrated a rather general practice during the formative years of contemporary youth—owing perhaps to a parental partiality for Bœotian precedents, including that of sowing serpent's teeth. Similarly with what may be called the secondary social education received by the present generation, and even with titular education itself, as I have already intimated, with its supplanting of standards of culture by ideals that further the withering of the world, as heretofore comprehended, and the exaltation more and more of the individual, as now apotheosized.



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Any friction springing from this assertion of individual independence is, however, lightly excused to the conscience of those to whom it is due by what is called, and immensely prized as—since moral considerations are inescapable—the “new sincerity.” Yet the new sincerity can be no advance on the old unless it is merely meant that there is more of it. Even so, in the realm of the intelligence sincerity is but an elementary virtue. It is often the hardest thing to forgive, as when, for example, it is vaunted as a superior substitute for intelligence itself. The common assertion of respect for another’s convictions on account of their sincerity in spite of disagreement with them is but an instance of confused thinking. You respect the person for this reason, not his convictions. If he is a person whose mental machinery in



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general is qualified for the construction of good ones, you respect them because in virtue of that fact they may be sound. The convictions of such a person may even affect your own. The case occasionally occurs, no doubt, though rare in these days of controversial acrimony unfavorable to deference in any discussion. But sincerity has nothing to do with it. The most that can be said for sincerity here is that a person who is sincere with himself is apt, other things being equal, to have superior light. Sincerity with oneself however is not what is meant and doubtless is as infrequent in the new sincerity, which is rather violent and emotional, as in the old — which also, being less conscious, is less constrained, more a habit than an attitude and less open to self-deception through self-interest in holding the pose.



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In any case pluming oneself on the outspokenness which spares no sensibilities is only a way of turning offensiveness into a virtue by focussing one's attention on oneself and is but one more detail of the seriousness with which the modern individual contemplates his individuality. "There have been heroes," says Thoreau, "for whom this world seemed expressly prepared," and beside whose "pure primeval natures" "the distinctions of morality, of right and wrong, sense and nonsense, are petty and have lost their significance." Even in the days of transcendentalism these heroes were probably background figures in the tapestry of time. Now they are all around us. Sitting of old on the heights they have stepped down with Freedom herself through town and field, though far less scornful than their august associate of the false-



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hood of extremes. The individual of course conceives genius to be far commoner than heretofore in consequence of the removal of old shackles, and he discovers it on every hand. He is saved from the fatuity of claiming it for himself — where he is so saved — by asserting all the same his rights to its privileges. But his vital urge is so insistent, his belief in self-expression so profound, as to make it not unnatural for him to suspect in himself heroic potentialities. The Whitman-like warmth of expansion he feels for his fellows, glorifying them so generously in the mass as to see them individually aureoled in the common effulgence, must in self-defense increase his self-respect. If there is the democracy of Pericles there is also that of Cleon and the psychology of the latter is not obscure.



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The individual character of our variety of socialism, loosely and untechnically so-called, keeps it within sentimental limits and confines it to an altruism which differs from what used to be known merely as unselfishness mainly in the greater freedom from self-discipline and the wider field for self-expansion in energies consecrated by benevolence but comforted by self-esteem. And it is easy to see how our latter-day luxuriance of poets and artists and novelists has flowered out of the new and broader conception of the dignity of the individual, which eliminates the sense of responsibility imposed by subscription to standards born of an interest in the welfare of organic mankind. Such a sentiment as that of Aurora Leigh, who it may still be remembered had devoted a good deal of reflection to art and life and to philanthropy as well:



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“Better far

Pursue a frivolous trade by serious means,  
Than a sublime art frivolously”

has now almost as quaint a sound as  
the even older observation,

“But wealth is crime enough to him that’s  
poor.”

So far as benevolence is concerned, however, it must be acknowledged that self-esteem was never more abundantly justified. Probably there never was a time in which there was so much warrant for a wide-spread secular feeling comparable to that which the young man of great possessions would have enjoyed had he taken the counsel he sought. To deny the need of new standards for new phenomena would indeed exemplify a smugness exaggeratedly Victorian — to employ the stigma so lavishly affixed to their own nest



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by the Stymphalidæ of the day. And the most conspicuous advance that can be chronicled is the penetration by the democratic spirit of society in general so as appreciably to have increased the sympathy between classes and stations in life. Secular society has certainly organized its benevolences on a larger scale and to better effect than ever before. Hawthorne was incorrigible and no doubt, had he written in the present era, would still have found a "Blithedale Romance" to write. But he could not now have written "The good of others, like our own happiness, is not to be attained by direct effort but incidentally," without considerably qualifying this comfortable half-truth in view of the multifarious benevolent agencies now everywhere successfully at work. The great changes since his day in material conditions, and the es-



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tablishment of practically permanent inequalities, have naturally evoked such agencies, and made strictly contractual ethics — first formulated by the first murderer — seem inadequate save to pharisaism, power and its parasites. But as regards the individual the psychology of “service” is still unsettled. The ideal has largely supplanted that of mere duty — hitherto proverbially “the law of human life.” “Service” as often illustrated is too compact of energy and emotion to submit to the discipline now felt to be so devitalizing, but heretofore a prime factor in the development of character of standard weight and fineness. Its consciousness has awarded it indulgences that have pushed all notion of penance into the background. *Du sollst entbehren* expresses an idea rarely heard of now save as necessarily involved in the pursuit of some prac-



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tical utility. The popular literature of philanthropy is fiercely polemic. Its claims for others are not obscurely associated with the conviction that its own have an equal warrant. The maintenance of rights — less justified by the human consciousness than duties, and only logically deducible *as* rights from the duties toward us of others — often appears as the assertion of such claims. Moreover the reverse of the medal is apt to monopolize the attention and the emotion of our host of amateur humanitarians, who “thrill” far more readily in response to the idea of wrongs than to that of their constructive righting. As a recent poet sings:

“It is a joy to curse a wrong.”

Indignation is the most self-indulgent of the passions — at least of those which may also be virtues. It re-



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quires no tension. The gentlest souls sag into its luxuriant embrace by mere relaxation, though remaining too long they undoubtedly discover it to be one of those things of which one may have too much and suffer accordingly — as do their friends. Nothing in fact is more characteristic of the complicated psychology of service pursued with enthusiasm than a certain savagery, subtly intensified by the self-righteousness that lies in wait for any altruism that is absorbing. And we may say that the philanthropic movement itself has become popularized, as it could hardly have been otherwise, by the affinity of a certain side of it for a particularly alluring form of original sin. Naturally our fiction reflects it as it does the other egoistic phenomena of our individualist independence. Accordingly, owing to its preoccupation with the superficial-



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ities of self-expression and of efferent energies so exclusively, we have had in recent years very little of it dealing with the inner life.



## V

### THE INNER LIFE

A DELIGHTFUL character in a recent delightful story thus unpacks her elderly heart about the youth of the day:

“Bless me, they all seem to me very worthy and very clever. They talk a great deal about humanity and what is good or bad for it, but the drawback is that they aren’t human themselves. Besides they have no sense of what is congruous. They belittle big questions by discussing them in season and out of season. Now no surroundings are incongruous to one’s thoughts. One can think of anything anywhere, but you can’t talk of anything anywhere; at least you can’t if you have any sense — I’m not sure whether to



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say of decorum or of humor. . . . The present generation all seem to me to have the lust of speech. No sooner do they think a little thought than they are in a desperate hurry to proclaim it far and wide. If no one hears it they feel it is wasted. They don't seem to take into account the immense importance of the thoughts that are not spoken, and consequently there is no background to what they *do* say."

The disappearance of the inner life could not be more cogently chronicled. The practice here implied of putting the stock instead of the samples into the show-window dissipates the perfume of personality inseparable from the radiation of the inner life — just as in art it sacrifices the suggestiveness that is of such signal interest to all minds but those devoid of association, blank of memory, and bereft of imagination. And just as, according



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to Stevenson, one of the conquests of romanticism over the classic starkness, the change from Fielding to Scott, as he noted, was the consciousness of the background, so the development of the personality in richness, in solidity, in seriousness, in everything worth while, in a word, depends upon the background in which self-respect supports the more salient self-activities, the background secured by reticence and reserve and secured by them alone. Reserve is as important to a character of any force as reserves to an army. The "little thoughts" of real thinkers are otherwise considerable than those Mrs. Pimblett had in mind precisely because they have backing. What characterizes the transformation of romanticism in its turn into naturalism *à outrance* is in fact consciousness of the foreground. Life is brought into a single plane and that



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plane too close for an agreeable perspective. And consciousness of the foreground necessarily obtrudes consciousness itself — always something to be dissembled in the interest of both life and art. Carlyle's insistence that it ought to be suppressed altogether is, I think, an extreme view. But intensified into self-consciousness it is surely a foreign element that should be kept out of the picture. It is also sand in the artist's machinery. And there is enough of it at present in life as well as in art to be awkwardly apparent, and involve much discomfort to the spectator.

Our lack of personal reserve is indeed in not only the self-conscious but the polemic stage, and even more aggressive than awkward. The current ideal of being *both* naked and unashamed has no precedent later than that of the Garden of Eden,



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when, too, the basis of serenity in these circumstances was physical innocence rather than moral insensibility. An itching for publicity is no doubt an integral trait of the unregenerate nature, but in its present development besides illustrating a propensity unleashed it appears as a positive propaganda, vaunting the superior claims of its gospel and delighting in the dismay of dissenters. The only obligation attached to "living one's own life" is apparently that of living it in public. This is particularly one of the by-products of the feminist movement which has done so much for those who need it and so little for those who do not. "Men serve women kneeling," says Thackeray; "when they get on their feet they go away." More go away, it is said, than formerly; perhaps because less needed they feel less wanted. One of the most success-



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ful lives I have known is that of a modern Cornelia, whose jewels, quite openly, consider it rather a failure because it has no literary, art, public uplift, or other forensic laurels to crown it. This stage is no doubt a transitory one and one need not linger over the kind of taste it betrays. The next may see sufficient sense winnowed by the threshing of old sillinesses of artificial reserves and overnice reticences to constitute a new composure that will be an advance on the old. Meantime one mainly notes that these reformations, proceeding by reaction, proceed slowly, and that the present crisis of suspension of standards through the mere enthusiasm of energy would be advantageously shortened by an even greater development of self-consciousness — to the point, namely, where one perceives the figure he is cutting while engaged in savoring



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the satisfaction he achieves. In which case our fiction, for example, would display less of what even the public ward of the maternity hospital screens, and would be freer from those intimate ineptitudes that are only paraded in letters because they are curtained in life.

The life of the senses, it is true, has had at times the advantage over purely routine existence of having a positive ideal of its own and therefore its own standards. In the antique world it developed a philosophy of extreme refinement. No social trait of pre-Revolutionary France is more familiar than that absence of grossness through which vice lost half its evil. Our own recent awakening to this life has been enthusiastic, and is still characterized by the protestant and reforming spirit, eclectic rather than evolutionary and inclined to imitate practices that



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contradict rather than modify the standards it now abjures. So that with the best disposition in the world we are still in the awkward age in our pursuit of the Epicurean ideal. The first thing the hero of "Locksley Hall," it will be remembered, proposed to do after he had "burst all links of habit" was not to rise on stepping-stones of his dead self to higher things, but to wed some savage woman and to procreate an inferior race. Being the heir of all the ages, however, he soon perceived that his dreams were wild — or, as we say now in our progressive dialect, "it can't be done" — and even came to count the gray barbarian lower than the Christian child. In a time when the heritage of the ages is regarded as a handicap and the barbarian though gray ranks higher than even the child if a Christian, we are inevitably thrown back on the



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natural man, whose propensities may be described as stable though standardless. What he is likely to do with them can be gathered from what happens anywhere when — in our graphic modern phrase again — the lid is taken off the social caldron. It can also be inferred from current social sentiment of one sort or another, such as the instinctive preference for the criminal to the police, which sees a Jean Valjean in every thief, and an implacable Javert in every constable and which, if not yet thoroughly popular, is definitely professed by the more thoroughgoing exponents of the new freedom — not to speak of irregularities with which, as I have suggested, the individual man sometimes recoups himself for the “service” he is so ardently eager to render to mankind.

For all to whom it is a novelty, in fact, the life of the senses has its *dis-*



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advantages. The first requisite for leading it is, of course, independence — the independence which is the first thing that the inner life recognizes as out of reach on any terms it is willing to accord. But independence is not the only requisite for leading it successfully. "It is when a man can do as he pleases," says Huxley, "that his troubles begin." They are not likely to be simplified if he takes the view of his independence that the newly liberated prisoner does, and rejoices in it as an end in itself. His taste is apt to suffer from the crudity inherent in experimentation. His attitude toward his fellows still in the bonds of conformity, alternating as it does between compassion and contempt, makes him quite unaware of how unattractive the bravado that attracts him seems to the unemancipated. Speaking strictly, the cow-



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boy "shooting up" civilization is hardly an exaggerated analogue of the figure presented, at least to the conservative mind, by some of the activities associated with the assertion of personal independence. To the conservative, that is to say, the experienced, mind, it seems for instance naïve to suppose that what is now so freely talked of as the single sexual standard will ultimately prove to be gold rather than silver. Meantime passing at parity, as economists warn us, the cheaper medium has the better chance. The life of the senses among us, in a word, will need to acquire standards in some degree constraining the desultory but constant impulses of the natural man before it can establish itself as a satisfactory substitute for the disciplines it aims at replacing. The self and the soul may be merely two conceptions of the same thing, but the one which is



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mainly kept in mind distinguishes much conduct from that derived from dwelling on the other.

The pride that Meredith notes as distinctively Pagan resembles as little the modern egotistic egoism that he flayed as it did the Christian humility that succeeded it as an ideal. And one of the two is essential to the inner life. Either will do; but without the pride whose self-respect scorns egotism or the humility whose spiritual refinement shrinks from it, the inner life is a desert. And the vitality of the present time seems independent of both. I have been assuming all along, I find, that abstractly at least the value of the inner life is axiomatically apparent to every thoughtful intelligence — however little it may conduce to the grosser forms of "service." Intelligence has never been more widespread nor more thoughtful. And one



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would expect it to associate the inner life with that ideal of personality which it entertains, even though apparently unaware of its failure as mere individuality to attain it. But really when one considers the aggressive self-assertion, the love of publicity, the feeling for instance that the truth should be spoken at all times even in advance of determining what it is, the frank and loyal exposure of one's whole personal bag of tricks — to take the most practical view of the proceeding — that at present flourish as virtues, one can hardly fail to perceive that the current ideal of personality is as defective as its realization is illusory.

Nothing, for example, is more characteristic of the inner life than the sentiment of awe, which has practically disappeared in the "clear-eyed and fearless" view of the universe that



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is now quite generally taken. The starry heavens and the moral law no longer arouse the feeling they did in the breast of Kant. The imagination is no longer nourished by reflection on what speculation has vainly tried to solve. Only the sensible fragment of the vast pattern of the universal scheme occupies the mind of a time intensely preoccupied by what it perceives. Outside the range of its perceptions it disports itself in all the relaxation of irresponsibility. Hence its deification of Poe and Whitman — the incongruous constellation it has set in the firmament of our letters as the Castor and Pollux of a heaven else a milky way of negligible nebulæ. "My whole nature," said Poe, "utterly revolts at the idea that there is any being in the Universe superior to myself." And we know who it was that good old Walt celebrated, even when he doesn't



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candidly say so but extends his theme without essentially varying it to include his fellow men merely as his fellow men. Since egotism, thus, is the sole nexus between such otherwise temperamentally opposite types as the fastidious and the swaggering artist, it is probably what endears them both to a generation to which egotism is so congenial and awe so antipathetic as to lead it to exteriorize even its sentiments into sensations.

In this process ethics as well as the personal morality to which I have referred suffers modification. Even if it may be looked at as the science of getting the most out of life there are distinctions between means to the end in view. The sensuous ideal of repletion is perhaps easiest to realize, though the effort to leave one's life a sucked orange at its close is doubtless more or less exhausting. "Well," ob-



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served an American of genius on his death-bed some years ago, "I can say this: I've never denied myself anything." "What you mean is," comfortingly replied a candid compatriot of equal but more analytic genius, "that what you've had, you've had in excess." A bystander, without genius but merely better acquainted with the standards imposed by the inner life, might have reflected that the business of getting through life creditably, though involving far more effort, reaps *pari passu* far more reward than the success either claimed by the one or suggested by the other of these Epicureans, beside whom, too, those of the present day would seem amateurs in hedonism.

Morality, however, is in greater or less degree a matter of the *mores* from which it derives, and, as Schiller, who did not foresee our eager and experi-



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mental age, says of mankind in general, "custom is its nurse." The springs of the present moment, which exteriorizes everything, are to be found more certainly in its attitude to the more fundamental matter of religion. The churches are no doubt fully alive to what confronts them in the militant and anarchic atheism that considers their agencies — of which it is grossly ignorant and which probably continue to administer the bulk of the world's beneficence — as outworn as their formal confessions. A theologically detached observer should perhaps confine himself to remarking that in any case they appear to have their work cut out for them. But remembering Arnold's characterization of religion as the most lovable of things, one can but reflect that it would be salutary to treat this attractive quality of lovableness a little less summarily



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than is sometimes done, and insist a little more pointedly on the truth that "service" is not a complete substitute for religion. Both Deuteronomy and the Gospel, dividing love into love of God and love of one's neighbor, assign the primacy to the former — in their own view we may be sure not conventionally but experientially. The reversal of this relation has very definite results, as we see in the case of France. France is such a splendid figure at the present time that the enthusiasm for her has reached the degree of *engouement* — an *engouement* that delights the soul of her earlier friends. Everybody can see it now. What she is and what she stands for shine over an area as wide as the world. At the same time one too long familiar with her conduct in crises to be surprised by her bearing now, may be permitted to recall his impression long



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ago recorded of routine France — namely, that to her reversal of the order of the two commandments on which hang all the law and the prophets, itself due to the high development of her social instinct, is due her ideal of social rather than personal morality, and the predominance in its following of the mind and heart over the soul. To this, nevertheless, the history of the “eldest daughter of the Church” presents a host of shining exceptions, and plainly to the religion that has been so strong a formative influence even of Voltairean France, to Catholicism with its sense of social unity, is largely to be ascribed the even step which in France the heart has kept with the mind.

Our history is too different to justify the current disposition to take over her ideals *en bloc* — including her emancipation from the despotism



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of the individual conscience, which certainly has its drawbacks, and her development of the life of the senses, out of which, as I have intimated, she has long made a very different thing from that which has thus far rewarded our own efforts in this direction. Our ideality in the field of the conscience is now experiencing the modification natural to expect of an individualism so ingrained as to tinge even our socialism with the color of anarchy. Long accustomed to hear that the kingdom of heaven is within one, it is not unnatural that the decline of formal religion among us and the invasion of the inner life by egotism should accord with a feeling that there, also, are to be found "whatever gods there be," in the words made less popular by Swinburne than by Henley's pæan — unlike Wordsworth's Nun, sonorous in self-adoration. The idea



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is an advance on Comte's doctrine of Humanity, though worked out with considerably less thoroughness. And conceiving of God as simply some ideal of our own, the human mind being assumed to be the highest creative agency known in nature, is a shorter and easier way of dealing with the subject than Joubert's method of knowing God by ceasing to try to define Him. It makes a great difference practically, however, in the life of society as well as in the life of the individual whether God is conceived as the "Eternal Not Ourselves" or as the "Eternal Ourselves." In the latter case, even in an age of egotism, it is easy for any one with a gift of introspection to see how in strict logic he may now and then become the very devil — in the letters and art, for example, which reflect the individual and communal life aforesaid. The in-



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ner life must at any rate be less and less effectively celebrated by letters and art in the degree of its consecration to the "Eternal Ourselves" within us, and perhaps its disappearance altogether would be involved in the survival of the sense of humor.



## VI

### "MODERN ART"

NO general feature of the time, perhaps, more markedly illustrates the main characteristics hitherto noted than the latest phase of modern art, the representative character of which accordingly has an interest independent of its intrinsic claims. It has in these latest days so monopolized the more comprehensive title that when "modern art" is referred to it is generally understood that its latest phase is meant. The "evolution" of painting since Monet, for example, sculpture since Rodin, the art that seems to the uninitiate extravagance and eccentricity — art *sans* taste, in fact, and, what is still more striking, *sans* virtuosity. This art leans



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rather heavily on metaphysics, which at last seems to have invaded the professional art arcanum — as to which one may feel less chagrin than surprise that it had not done so before. It is in consequence extremely theoretic and in theory lays great stress on personality. But, though it is plainly tremendously individual, owing to the confusion I have already spoken of, whereby individuality is mistaken for this very different quality, it is led into the error of justifying its extravagances by its sincerity — regarding them, that is to say, as personal expression instead of wilful eccentricity. How otherwise than by this confusion account for its combination of sincerity and an extravagance so extreme as to appear mystification? Given its sincerity why is it that so many concrete examples of theoretic personality are so destitute of the distinction that,



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precisely, is the sign manual of personality and are instead, as Henry James might say, so damnably commonplace? For I take it nothing is more commonplace than extravagance without distinction. If in a word you are absolutely sincere and what you show — to anything but the microscope — is some manifestation of “group consciousness” rather than an idiosyncratic expression, you are probably mistaken about your personality — at least in the higher reaches where it becomes perceptible to others. One understands what Mr. Dougherty means by “academic.” Extravagance has no standards, of course, as both terms of the word itself recognize. But sincerity, being a positive quality, has. And to deny sincerity to the modern movement is to evince a disposition which in itself tends to explain it as a movement and which



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illustrates the trades-union spirit instinctive in all fields, not only of art and letters but of life, wherein men have reached the formulæ of their *métier* only after a prolonged and often painful apprenticeship. Mr. Clive Bell, portions of whose book entitled "Art" might give a salutary jolt to some of our conservatives, draws a touching picture of young painters he has seen in Paris "penniless, half-fed, unwarmed, ill-clothed, their women and children in no better case, working all day in feverish ecstasy at unsalable pictures." One feels that they were young, and learns with more surprise that "they were superbly religious." "Superbly religious" is, as we now say, "a new one." But we must be on our guard against Mr. Clive Bell, who adds succinctly, "All artists are religious," and who is so far from conceiving religion as "morality touched with emo-



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tion” as apparently to believe it emotion untouched with morality, or with anything indeed save the desire to manifest itself. However, we may certainly credit his testimony to the sincerity of his young friends. No doubt the movement has its share of charlatanism. Nothing so theoretic as to sophisticate its practice can avoid doing so. Besides as Napoleon observed: “Where will you not find charlatanism?”

But it is fatuous to diagnose as charlatanism what irritates you because you have first irritated it, and what excites such wide-spread enthusiasm. To see in it on the other hand a spirit too protestant in its origin to promise positiveness in its development, and under illusions as to the constructiveness of its character, is to take a more rational as well as more receptive attitude — is, in effect, merely



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to confess an inability to see it otherwise and endeavor to explain the reasons for one's incapacity. One may, however, remember the tendency of fanaticism, which by definition has sincerity to spare, to accrete a fringe of imposture, and perceive in the mysticism associated with the new movement at least a mild menace of the mystification to which the esoteric is always exposed, and from which it is only to be saved by the interposition now and then of exoteric standards. My only point is that the new art, however provided with ideas, has not yet standardized them sufficiently to make them appear to others as other than notions, that it is held back from doing so by its hostility to standards in themselves in its pursuit of freedom, and that it would be a good thing all around if it should get some standards of its own, instead of "thrilling" the



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observer by flouting the conventional. It could do this without subscribing to Mr. Cox's dictum that there is no progress in art, which to any one who conceives art as an expression of life can only be true if there is no progress in life — a tenable hypothesis surely but perhaps not widely enough held to repay argument. It would, at all events, in this way further what it conceives to be progress by minimizing the retarding friction of reaction which so inveterately dogs the steps of extravagance. A young American painter in Paris ardently enamored of the new movement remarked to me that only about three per cent of it was sound but that this was enough to justify it. Still, remembering how much mass counts in matters of this kind one may say that his percentage will have to be increased if the movement is not to exemplify anew the



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eternal seesaw between what is called "going too far" and not going at all. There has been, we must admit, a good deal of the latter, and since it seems to be the former's turn, it is perhaps less quixotic to hope its present irresponsible individualism will not continue to leave progress wholly to chance, than to expect any disturbance of the stasis of routine practice that has conventionalized the vitality out of its own standards.

Meantime in spite of its theory it is a condition with which the latest art confronts us. What it says of itself impresses us less than how it looks. Its positive side is as yet so dominated by its polemic spirit as to make it doubtful if it be not after all less a stage than a "sport" in art evolution. Its advocates assert its analogy with the men of 1830. The fundamental contrast appears in a single example.



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Delacroix spent years copying in the Louvre. Some of the energumens of the present wish to burn the museums. All convinced modernists maintain that, splendid as is the drawing of some of the old masters, beautiful as is the rendering of Velasquez and so on, art is still in its infancy because its potentialities have just begun to be perceived. A familiar illustration cited by them is that of the aeroplane, which betrays precisely the confusion of art with science that formally they deplore. And in effect the contribution to the development of art of the movement preceding their own must be viewed, although certainly not belittled, as mainly a technical contribution. No one can fail to acknowledge the technical change that owing to an influence beginning with Manet and Monet has keyed up current exhibitions everywhere, including the most academic of



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our own. In consequence of it what first strikes one now in current exhibitions is the subordination of substance to surface. The substitution of absolute for relative values by Manet, the addition of sunlight unenforced by shadow together with the use of broken color by Monet, comprise a contribution constituting an authentic and standardized advance. The artist has certainly developed a new expertness in seeing things in color and in seeing color in things, coincidently with the discovery that more vibrant and brilliant solidity could be achieved by combining the elements of the spectrum in the eye rather than on the palette. At a certain distance in this way an effect could be obtained surpassing in pure quality any effect attainable by blended unification at any distance however slight. Painting bound into its own handbook a



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leaf from the practice of the master mosaicists and gleams from Ravenna glowed anew on modern canvases.

Thereupon ensued the epoch of exaggeration and fantasticality. Seeing mainly the novelty in the work of its immediate predecessors, and apparently not recognizing in their color discovery essentially an adaptation of an old principle inevitable in an old practice, it set about the business of being novel itself by main strength. In the way of exaggeration we have for example the sacrifice to carrying power of what used to be called the "handsome canvas" — a sacrifice that can be minimized only if the easel picture is to go, which is a practical absurdity. Meanwhile what is gained if the illusion of relief and the effect of brilliancy are heightened by the blending of distance so that a canvas only shows at thirty feet a quality it



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loses at ten, besides losing also everything that constitutes it a "handsome canvas"? And except in an exhibition it is at ten that it is seen. Of course it is interesting to see it gain in "vitality" as one moves away from it. But this interest is a scientific and not an æsthetic one. Nor is vitality everything. There are some things that demand a delicacy of technic inconsistent with it.

"Light feet, dark violet eyes and parted hair,  
Soft dimpled hands, white neck and creamy  
breast"

deserve to be seen near to, where alone their delicacy can be appreciated and where accordingly they should not appear under the aspect of

Lead feet, bold, blue-black eyes and violet hair,  
Hard knotty hands, green neck and chalky  
breast,

however they may regain their mere identity and even acquire an added



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vitality at a distance. The note of vitality is capable of being forced, and when it is forced systematically the sense of beauty in both artist and beholder must suffer some attrition in the long run. Certain elements of this sense, such as its feeling for the exquisite and the elegant, are already extinct in "modern art," in none of whose manifestations is there any trace of the quality that makes a masterpiece of every canvas of a painter like, for example, Charles Bargue. And indeed the convinced modernist is quite logical in conceiving beauty as once conceived not his affair at all. Otherwise his canvases would at his chosen distance evince a different kind of elementary taste from that which they sometimes exhibit — mass, for example, look less messy and detail have more distinction. The vitality of an *ensemble* of properties without any par-



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ticular quality, to which he so often treats us must be of a more or less galvanic order.

In the way of fantasticality we have also technical experimentation in search of novelty *à outrance* — post-impressionism, futurism, cubism. But here the standardless emotionalism of the time is more universal, more fundamental, and more evident than in its mere exaggeration, and here we enter the penetralia of a metaphysical cultus which ascribes an esoteric quality to the artist as such. Here when he comes to exteriorize the emotion his possession of, or rather by, which is plainly not illusory since it is so obviously in large part his explanation, his logic is less conspicuous than it is when he is engaged in sacrificing insipid beauty to the Moloch of vitality. For instance, Mr. Clive Bell, again, asserts quite truly that “a prac-



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tical person goes into a room where there are chairs, tables, sofas, a hearth-rug, and a mantelpiece and takes note of each of these things intellectually," whereas "the artist *qua* artist" is concerned with them "only as a means to a particular kind of emotion." Why, then, has Vermeer ceased to thrill the "modern"? Because, apparently, he expresses his emotion by the representation that will communicate it. At least Mr. Clive Bell continues a little later that "manifestation is as different from 'expression' as Monmouth is from Macedon." The distinction confirms our worst suspicions as to much of the concrete art which Mr. Clive Bell celebrates, and of which many of the manifestations seem so manifestly expressionless. The theory is a labor-saving one but not otherwise attractive, because even expression in art needs to be supplemented by com-



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munication if it is to be appreciated at all. "Every expressor is related solely to himself" announces one of the exhibitors in the *catalogue déraisonné* of a recent modern show. As to which the observer may reflect with Mr. Santayana that "solipsism in another is absurd." The artist cannot be permitted to function for himself alone. Such selfishness would in ordinary eyes compromise even his religious character. And if he is to be appreciated he must communicate. Otherwise his emotional manifestation must mystify us. If he has not, in popular parlance, "got it over," how do we know he has got it out? He has perhaps had his catharsis, but in secret. Besides we want ours. Ours, indeed, was the one Aristotle had in mind.

At bottom this explains the puzzled resentment of the beholder, who *qua*



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beholder is not religious in any sense. He feels cheated of his dues, and manifests emotion too, though emotion of the expressionable kind, clearly his only way of getting even with the artist. And how is the artist to communicate save through appearances? We know of course that the form of an egg is not really its shell, but the modern artist had better forget metaphysics and think it is if we are to share the emotion its "pure form" produces in him. Speculation aside — since it is already in shreds — what one practically notes in much "modern art," objectively considered, is that representation instead of being artistic rather than literal is approximate rather than close, attesting incapacity to render rather than ability to generalize. The same glance reveals the target and records the miss. Subjectively we must take the artist's



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word for his success. We need his own private sources of information to see in his treatment of his theme the expression or manifestation of his personality — to recur to the illusion of personality with which he clothes his sense of himself as an individual. We can only see that what he maintains he has first analyzed and then alembicated, and that what he seeks because it is elusive and abstract, has proved elusive and is certainly not concrete. What he has failed to keep out is as little personal as what he has succeeded in putting in. He may be an altogether different kind of man from what we should naturally expect, and we ought perhaps to be more careful than we sometimes are to avoid doing him the injustice he is at no pains to forefend. He may, so far as we can see, have a sensitive soul and an intelligent mind enriched



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with experience and even erudition. But it is idle to fancy we could infer anything so concrete from an algebraic alembication of the elusive and the abstract, in the absence of standards with which he has not only not furnished us but to the mere notion of which he is inveterately opposed.

At all events his sincerity has not been able to protect him against mistaking self-assertion for independence and it is easy to see in many of his “manifestations” the aggressiveness characteristic of attenuated personality. The chief figures in this distinctly notional movement have certainly characters as clearly concentrated as they are obviously limited. But in the work of the mass of their followers derivation is the first — and last — thing noticeable, when indeed the work rises out of a mere mechanical reflection of the notionality of the movement



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considered as a whole. Never was a convention so quickly established as this convention of the unconventional. Never, for this reason, has a major convention been so quickly productive of a multitude of minor ones wherein the personal force of independence has been so speedily paralyzed by the poison of irresponsibility. The personal force moreover that operates at ease on the plane and in the region delimited by standards insensibly established, must naturally be constricted and enfeebled when driven into the enclosure of a movement largely technical and chiefly characterized by exaggeration and fantasticality. The work of the real personalities of current art, those who feel a new sentiment in nature, such as that of the particular place, those who feel new aspects of nature, as those disclosed by more attentive consideration of light and



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color, those in other words whose work is the interpretation of new discoveries in their inexhaustible material, who, as Carrière declared, "love discovery and detest invention," inevitably subscribe to recognized standards in quality of aim and effort. And in doing so they undoubtedly contrast rather than accord with the great mass of a movement whose technical experimentation is no more to be explained than it is to be justified by employing the terms of metaphysical notionalty to characterize the work of a rather hastily assumed artistic temperament. Pictures for the blind, music for the deaf, if they have the intellectual interest claimed for them, have it in virtue of a scientific rather than an artistic appeal, and naturally therefore escape slavery to such standards as are here in question. And of course science negates personality. The curi-



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osity stimulated and satisfied by the average collection of "modern art" may be a far livelier feeling than that aroused by an exhibition of academic inanities but it is not an artistic feeling. It is aroused by an inspection of technic rather than substance and must content itself with less personal feeling than can be observed in the most conventional academic array whose technic, at all events, has not distracted the artist however little it may divert the spectator. Of course I am not speaking of beautiful technic, which has an abundant if inferior artistic interest, but of the particular technic of much "modern art" which is at once its characterizing and, from the standpoint of beauty, its most repellent feature.

Beauty indeed is one of the few abstractions it views as necessarily conventional, but its theory here does



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not save it from the caricature inherent in its extravagance of exaggeration and fantasticality. Caricature is, of course, not simply queerness. It is the exaggeration, as art is the emphasis, of the essential. But what is mere accent to the temperamentally crude, however esoterically expert, is exaggeration to the cultivated. Obviously, therefore, the only path to any consensus whereby "modern" may succeed established art as a later phase of orderly evolution — as, for example, romanticism did classicism and naturalism romanticism — lies through the cultivation of the crude. What we are now rather delightedly witnessing, however, is rather the contamination of the cultivated, exhibited in individual eccentricities which find even their own bond of union in a common hostility to the standardizing influence of taste. The fact that these eccen-



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tricies tend rapidly through imitation to establish their own several conventions is to be explained by contagion — which conserves its character whatever the personal force of the individuals it attacks. It loses to be sure its intensity in spreading; the tendency of the unconventional to establish conventions of its own is as I said marked. Thereupon it is left with those conventions on its hands, conventions ineffaceably stamped with the fundamental eccentricity of their origin, however they may come to pass as current coin. This reasoning is clearly less applicable to the constructive than to the purely revolutionary element in modern art. The difficulty is that the constructive element is so largely a matter of technic and of technic so largely unalleviated by taste.



## VII

### THE CAUSE OF ART AND LETTERS

**A**RE art and letters to be sentimentalized out of their established standards by the comprehensive and militant democratic movement of our time? is the question in which our whole discussion ends. Still more succinctly, are they to be produced by and for the crude or the cultivated? Hitherto — miracles of genius excepted, as an incalculable element in any discussion — they have been produced by special and arduous training, for the appreciation of general and hardly less arduously attained culture — the rest of the interested public taking its cue from these as at least useful guides and not, as at present,



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instinctively suspicious of them as vitiated by professionalism. The expert it is true in all departments of effort has his own personal equation for which it is always prudent to make due allowance. But the field of art and letters is after all a circumscribed one in the world of mankind's activities, and its proper cultivation has reached a pitch of intensiveness that demands more knowledge and training than mere inkling and energy have at their command. The artist who with Mr. Clive Bell conceives art as religion easily brings himself to avoid difficulties painful to surmount, and naturally deems it a business of the soul. Like the water of life in the Apocalypse it is in his view to be taken freely and by all comers. Multitudes have certainly come, such numbers indeed as to put the principle of natural selection quite out of commission and make one look



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back wistfully to the old disciplined novitiate as a preparation for, at least, the priesthood of the cult.

Paul Baudry was not a great artist in the sense of being an artist of original genius. But consider his career and accomplishment as an example of what intelligent instead of sentimental democracy can produce. Mr. Low sketches it for us in his Scammon Lectures. He was the son of a *sabot* maker in a small provincial town. Instead of considering exclusively its own material needs the commune, having discovered intimations of genuine talent in him, taxed itself to send him to Paris. Hard work won him the *prix de Rome*. Years of study at the Villa Medici, and the culture he as inevitably as unconsciously absorbed in the Roman atmosphere of elevated æsthetic achievement, resulted in his decoration of the *Nouvel Opéra*, a work



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which, whatever its faults or shortcomings, simply pinnacles him as one of the salient figures in painting of the nineteenth century. The "expressor related solely to himself" may justifiably interest us less. Supposing this person to have condescendingly entered so banal a structure as Garnier's masterpiece he may quite legitimately, I think, note the weakness of Baudry's personal expression, the derivative character of his beautiful drawing and skilful composition, his attenuation of the Raphaelesque in his exclusive continuance of its tradition. But in the way of accomplishment, of perpetuating the spirit of the monumental and the beautiful, what is in comparison his own eager but wanton experimentation in an august field, entered without credentials of specific equipment or general culture? The contrast is striking but is merely typical



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of that necessarily constant between disciplined and so-called free art.

But conceding the artist's possession of his craft and the pitch of cleverness that our writers have achieved, the weakness of those young friends of Mr. Clive Bell, the weakness in fact of the practitioner in general in the field of art and letters at the present time, is that not as an artist nor as a writer but as a man he does not know enough. The fact may be noted without invidiousness, since it only places him in the same category in which Arnold set Byron and Wordsworth — the two figures in English literature that after Shakespeare and Milton he deemed the most majestic. But it is not necessary to argue from august examples the value of knowledge to the criticism of life on a stately scale, in order to appreciate the importance to any specific work of intelligence of its



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intellectual connotation. It is indeed of primary importance that this too should be important in order to secure the importance of the work itself. If the work is to appeal to any observer or reader who really counts, it must stimulate associations of real value and not merely produce a reaction of the senses. Therefore the painter or the poet must himself have these associations. Otherwise how evoke them in others? It is a commonplace that no one can know anything well without knowing other things too. In point of fact the first thing we wish to know, to feel, to see in a work of art is just this: What and how much does the mind of the artist contain? What is its other furniture besides merely the special aptitude and equipment required for the production of this particular thing, of which this particular thing is but the sample? It is



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not the foot that interests us but Hercules. We are brought around finally, I think, to make the same demand of culture in the case of the artist, which I began by suggesting in the case of his public. To require the artist to know more is, however, to exact something quite out of keeping with the spirit of the time.

For example, there is Mr. Eastman's delightful and notable book, "Enjoyment of Poetry," one of the most considered contributions that have been made to American criticism. Mr. Eastman is a poet himself. And more even than in poetry he is interested in increasing the stock of human happiness. Naturally he thinks of poetry as an ally. And a genuine and valuable ally he makes it out to be. It would be hard to find elsewhere more penetrating observations upon the art of poetry, all quite new as well as evi-



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dently long pondered and fitting beautifully together in demonstration of his interesting thesis. But, in dwelling on its idiosyncratic quality, which is of course quite independent of knowledge, he certainly inclines to divorce the practice of poetry from the knowledge with which if it is important it is infallibly associated. He says archly: "To attribute to it the origin of great poetry, is paying too high a compliment even to so valuable a thing as ignorance" — as if he knew anything about ignorance! But he adds that "there is a certain antithesis between poetry and knowledge" and that "poetry exists either before that is acquired or after it is surmounted." Naturally he can demonstrate what poetry *is* as distinguished from prose, by Whitman as well as by Wordsworth. And thinking thus of its distinctive character rather than of its



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comparative rank, ignoring thus one of the standards which measure its value — since it would be idle to maintain that any poetry is superior to any prose, that of the savage, for instance, to the prose of Burke — he comes winningly, but not quite convincingly, to suggest to all of us who wish to enjoy poetry to make our own. “Better even than understanding poetry as a way to learn the enjoyment of it,” he concludes finely, “— and that without alienation from the better poem of one’s own existence — is to create it for one’s self.” Mr. Eastman speaks, as the French say, *bien à son aise*. The rest of us may justifiably feel some self-distrust, and continue to get our enjoyment out of the born poets, more particularly those possessed of knowledge as well as faculty. *Posunt quia posse videntur* implies in this case too hopeful a view. But there



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is no doubt whatever that at the present time enjoyment of poetry is being largely extracted from its production. And so far as value is concerned the prodigious production of it that marks our epoch must be admitted to contribute far less to the enjoyment of others than the poetry which preceded it and which, if strictly professional, was far more intimately associated with that general knowledge now so generally disesteemed. General knowledge, too, quite aside, it is curious to note how much more lightly its special technic is taken in comparison with music, for example. A generation ago every young woman played the piano. Now she realizes the vanity of expecting to do so well. A generation hence, it may be, she will be convinced that poetry is a difficult art also.

Of course, as I began by saying, the



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public equally with the artist and writer has the cause of art and letters in its keeping. And so far as knowledge is an advantage in art and letters it is the business of the larger public — not to possess it, to expect which would not only be unreasonable but unnecessary — but to respect it, as it is the business of the “remnant” to exact it. To advocate any peremptory agencies to this end would be as illusory as Mr. Howells shows it to be in his amusing story, “The Critical Bookstore.” The philanthropist who sets up this establishment to combine censorship with commercialism apparently deals in fiction exclusively — where certainly the field for both commerce and censure is so vast as perhaps to justify a monopoly of his benevolent efforts. His experiment proves multifariously unsatisfactory, and experiencing a total change of heart he shuts up his



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shop, and announces his conversion by expressing a repugnance to artificial selection which, even without his experience, we can all share. But he expresses also a resignation to the processes and results of *natural* selection in which it requires a very considerable amount of optimism to participate. "What is all the worthy family of asses to do," he exclaims, "if there are no thistles to feed them?" Is the case so desperate as that? Is, indeed, this family to be regarded as a constant quantity? Why, at any rate, contribute to keep it so by pampering it with its favorite food? Why not, in a word, deplore the number of asses rather than the failure of the thistle crop? It is, no doubt, less a practical than a sentimental matter, but the more the cultivation of thistles comes to be looked upon with disfavor, whatever the demand for



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them, the more the taste for them is likely to diminish and even an asinine demand arise for different provender. No one considers morals a matter to be left to natural selection. Does the intellect need less help? The converted critical-bookstore keeper proceeds to state his view of the Republic of Letters as "a vast, benevolent, generous democracy where every one may have what one likes," and his conception of literature as "the whole world, the expression of the gross, the fatuous, the foolish, as well as the expression and the pleasure of the wise, the fine, and the elect." But it is notoriously difficult to keep pace with the zeal of the convert, and one wonders if his ideal in this case is not fundamentally a humane rather than a literary one. How better express the distinction between mere printed matter and literature than by saying the latter is just



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this: "the expression and the pleasure of the wise, the fine, and the elect"? And why not observe the distinction even while remembering the commanding claims of human happiness? Perhaps after all some other way may be found of satisfying these claims than by adulterating figs with thistles, or by encouraging the critical inspector to "pass" thistles as figs, especially bearing in mind the tendency — observed by Renan — which the thistles have to get the upper hand. Perhaps after all figs in plenty would become more popular in quarters gradually finding it as uncomfortable to be viewed *de haut en bas* by the gentle heart as by the arrogant mind.

At all events it is to have in mind some other cause than that of art and letters, to conceive of these as an absolutely unenclosed domain — the common of civilization, so to say, whose



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weedy aspects and worn places and rubbish heaps are as legitimate details as its cultivated area. Ought not access to this territory to be made more difficult, as difficult as possible? At least let us have a gate — the strait gate whereby he who has some kind of credentials may enter in, and so far as possible win public opinion to approve the closing up of those other ways accessible to the thief and the robber. *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* Not the authority of autocracy certainly; nor even that of criticism whose function, as I said, is the exposition of the principles that are the test of standards, so much as the standards themselves which arise insensibly in the mind of the cultivated public and spread in constantly widening circles. Mankind, once more, is wiser than any man, and its correlative in the case of arts and letters is the public, whose



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co-operation is quite as important as that of their professional representatives. For it is always to be remembered that the cause of letters, the cause of art, is not that of its practitioners — hardly that of its practice — but of its constituting standards. Just as the cause of mankind is not that of the men who compose it, which it is the weakness of purely material philanthropy to forget. The idea is not a vague one. And since I have ventured to speak of routine France as more sympathetic than devout, I may note that, so far from being vague, it is an idea which is at the present time being illustrated not only splendidly, supremely, but with that precision which in the world of ideas is a French characteristic. We have before our eyes the demonstration of its definiteness by an entire people animated with the clear consciousness



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that what counts for them, in this brief interlude of time between two eternities, is not the comfort or even the lives of any or all Frenchmen, but the perpetual renewal of the consecrated oil that feeds the torch of France.







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